



King's Research Portal

DOI:

[10.1192/bjp.2018.50](https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.2018.50)

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication record in King's Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Jones, E. (2018). They called it Shell Shock: combat stress in the First World War. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 213(4), 618-21. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.2018.50>

Citing this paper

Please note that where the full-text provided on King's Research Portal is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Post-Print version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version for pagination, volume/issue, and date of publication details. And where the final published version is provided on the Research Portal, if citing you are again advised to check the publisher's website for any subsequent corrections.

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Research Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognize and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the Research Portal

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact librarypure@kcl.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

MS ID#: BJP/2017/202911

MS TITLE: They Called it Shell Shock: Combat Stress in the First World War, Stefanie Linden, Helion and Company Limited, 2016, hb, £19.99, 272pp, ISBN: 978-1911096351

By creating psychological casualties on a mass scale, the First World War drew British psychiatry from the margins of the asylum system to a position of national importance. The management of shell shock was both a military and a medical emergency. This original study by Stefanie Linden compares the presentation and treatment of functional neurological disorders in Germany and the UK. Based on research into case notes at the National Hospital for the Paralysed and Epileptic in Queen's Square, London, and the Charité in Berlin, she found significant differences in symptom patterns of servicemen invalidated from the frontline with severe or intractable disorders, despite similar diagnostic criteria, specialist expertise and management techniques. Although functional motor or sensory symptoms (shaking, trembling, paresis, contractures, difficulty walking, speaking or hearing) were common to both samples, 28% of German patients exhibited pseudo-seizures or fitting in the absence of epilepsy or a head wound in contrast to 7% of British soldiers admitted to the National. Further, psychogenic fits were widely reported in German medical literature during the war but were considered rare by British doctors. Physicians in Germany associated functional seizures with youth and low social status but no significant difference could be detected in the age or rank of the two samples. This important, trans-national comparison of a post-combat syndrome suggests that culture framed expressions of distress through prevailing beliefs about neurological illness.

Not only does Linden explore the symptomatology of shell shock, causal explanations and the treatments offered in Britain and Germany are also analysed. Detailed descriptions of individual patients are offered, tying their illnesses to the soldiers' battlefield experiences. Specific chapters explore themes of desertion, suicide and the short-lived opportunities offered to women doctors. Linden also presents a nuanced view of Lewis Yealland, the junior doctor commonly accused of the brutal treatment of servicemen. Although the application of electric shock is not denied, she argues that Yealland integrated its use with suggestion, demonstration of preserved function and the communication of a physiological illness model. The compelling narrative is driven by the clinical records, which demonstrate beyond any doubt the capacity of war to ruin the lives of young men.

Edgar Jones Institute of Psychiatry Psychology & Neuroscience, King's College London, Weston Education Centre, 10 Cutcombe Street, London SE5 9RJ, UK. Email: edgar.jones@kcl.ac.uk